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SCHOOLSCAPES

WORKING TOGETHER

Summary

TOURING THE REGIONS
Implementation of the Reform in Secondary Cycle Two 3

A CLOSER LOOK AT THE EDUCATION REFORM 4

UPDATE ON SECONDARY CYCLE TWO 5.1

LEARNING PATHS 6

PREPARING FOR IMPLEMENTATION 8.3

STAFF TRAINING 8.6

SUBJECT-SPECIFIC TRAINING IN ENGLISH 8.7

A NEW APPROACH TO MEET THE CHALLENGES OF A NEW CENTURY
19th Province-Wide Meeting on the Reform 9

LAUNCHING THE QUÉBEC EDUCATION PROGRAM FOR SECONDARY CYCLE TWO
Meeting of the Program Development Committees 11.1

INTRODUCTION TO THE QEP: WHAT'S NEW IN SECONDARY CYCLE TWO 11.3

Science and Technology: Two Different Programs for Two Different Paths 11.5

A New Optional Program: Spanish as a Third Language 11.6

WHAT ARE YOUR STUDENTS READING? 12

THE CULTURAL DIMENSION IN SCHOOLS
Annual Art Exhibit Invites Community to Appreciate Student Talent 14

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY AT THE HEART OF OUR CULTURE 15

LAPTOPS FOR EVERYONE 15.1

Québec

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This first issue of 2007 looks at the education reform in Secondary Cycle Two. Our main focus will be on the diversification of learning paths, differentiated instruction, and the resulting changes to school and pedagogical organization. These themes were front and centre at the major events throughout the fall, which included regional meetings with school administrators, the October 16 session with the Secondary Cycle Two program development committees and the province-wide meeting of administrators held October 31 and November 1.

This issue reflects the intense activity in the education system in recent months. Of course, Secondary Cycle Two is about to undergo important changes, but we are also very much aware that the implementation of the reform is continuing at the preschool, elementary and Secondary Cycle One levels, with all the energy and creativity that have been evident from the start.

This month, *Schoolscapes* also features the Riverside School Board's annual ArtsSmarts Vernissage and reports on the "And what are you reading?" conference held last spring.

And finally, as this will be the last print edition of *Schoolscapes*, we invite readers to look for us next April, in our new electronic form. As announced at the beginning of the school year, the magazine is going on-line in a format designed to be reader-friendly.

All the very best for 2007!

Claude Fortier, Service de la recherche
Direction de la recherche, des statistiques et des indicateurs, MELS

A STUDY ON THE ACADEMIC PROGRESS OF SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS WITH SOCIAL MALADJUSTMENTS OR LEARNING DISABILITIES

The Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport has published the results of a study titled *Classe ordinaire et cheminement particulier de formation temporaire – Analyse du cheminement scolaire des élèves en difficulté d'adaptation ou d'apprentissage à leur arrivée au secondaire*. Its purpose was to compare the academic progress of students with social maladjustments or learning disabilities upon their arrival in secondary school at 12 and 13 years of age, according to whether they were enrolled in regular classes with support measures or in a temporary individualized path for learning.

Students' academic progress varied greatly according to the kind of service they received at the beginning of secondary school. Students enrolled in regular classes right from the start managed to stay in regular classes longer than those who were first grouped in a temporary individualized path for learning; their graduation rate after five years was higher, and fewer abandoned their studies.

In comparing students immediately enrolled in regular classes with those enrolled in a temporary individualized path for learning, the following results were found:

- The rate for staying in regular classes was 68% and 45% for students who were 12 years of age, and 36% and 17% for students who were 13 years of age.
- The graduation rate was 30% and 7% for students 12 years of age, and 15% and 6% for students 13 years of age.
- The dropout rate after five years of secondary school was 18% and 25% for students 12 years of age, and 40% and 47% for students 13 years of age.

The academic progress of students varied as much according to their age upon arrival in secondary school as according to the type of service they received at that time. Students who started secondary school at 12 years of age had higher success rates than those who started at 13 years of age and who were, therefore, already behind in their learning.

Regardless of their age upon arriving in secondary school, students with behavioural difficulties did not do as well as those who had either mild or severe learning disabilities: in total, they spent fewer years in regular classes and abandoned their studies earlier. Among students enrolled in regular classes at the start of secondary school, students with a behavioural difficulty were twice as less likely to obtain their diploma after five years as those with a mild or severe learning disability.

School professionals will be able to use the findings of this study in their reflections on how to organize services for Secondary Cycle One students. To bring this research a step further, future studies could explore or review the pilot projects being carried out in some schools, with a goal to setting up other service models that could meet the diverse needs of students in Secondary Cycle One. These initiatives are concrete ways of fostering success for the greatest possible number, in keeping with the ministerial orientations underlying the education reform as well as the *Policy on Special Education*.

The integral study is available in French on the Web site of the Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport, under "publications" and then "études et recherches":

<http://www.mels.gouv.qc.ca/stat/recherche/index.htm>

SCHOOLSCAPES

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Touring the Regions

Pascale Sauvé

These meetings, organized at the request of various associations, were planned and developed by the Ministère in close collaboration with partners in the education community.

The objective of these professional development sessions was to communicate information and to take stock of work underway, focusing on four broad themes: the learning paths, the evaluation of learning, implementation conditions and staff training. The sessions also sought to foster exchange and to collect the questions, comments and concerns of participants. Thus, after information was presented on each theme, participants were invited to discuss their concerns and to write down their questions and comments. Participants then had the opportunity to ask their questions and express their views before the MELS facilitators representing the various sectors.

During this tour, the Ministère met almost all representatives from the province's school boards and school administrations.

Schoolscapes took part in the tour, and in this issue gives a complete report on the status of the implementation of the education reform in Secondary Cycle Two.

A Closer Look at the Education Reform

Pascale Sauvé

Québec's education system, which covers preschool, elementary and secondary school, is one of the best in the world," Bergevin began. "In fact, we are an example for several countries. And one of the factors that enables us to continue to have a quality education system is our capacity for renewal and to adapt to the real world." The Estates General on Education of the 1990s sparked intense debate, as Québec society questioned how to transform its education system in order to adapt it to the realities of the coming 21st century. Now the 21st century is here. "We cannot, in any way, educate the students placed in our care the same way as we were educated in the 1960s, 70s and 80s," he said. "They will face different challenges, and so we must prepare them accordingly."

At the end of this process of reflection and discussion, Québec society reached the conclusion that pedagogical renewal had to have three main goals: to ensure success for all, with a qualification in the form of a secondary school diploma or a qualification preparing students for the job market; to ensure that students would be ready to play a role as active citizens in the 21st century and to meet the challenges of their world; and to educate individuals who would not just rely on the competencies they had acquired sitting in the classroom, but who would be able to work both independently and in collaboration with others to continue developing their competencies throughout their lives. "That is what motivated this change, and I believe it is an important element to remember," Bergevin emphasized.

In 2005-2006, the education reform reached a major milestone: the transition from elementary to secondary school. "The education reform has become a reality in Secondary Cycle One," the assistant deputy minister noted. "Next year, we will take another step forward by carrying out the education reform in Secondary Cycle Two. It is a cycle with its own challenges, distinct characteristics and special requirements, making it another big step to take—and we will do it in 2007!" The message was clear; indeed, the Minister has stated his intention to carry the education reform through to completion, in all schools across Québec.

Recognized principles

During the work of the Table de pilotage du renouveau pédagogique, a committee composed of representatives from the MELS and its main partners in education, several principles were recognized. These are elements that must be taken into consideration in order to continue implementing the education reform, in particular in Secondary Cycle Two.

One of these principles involves taking into account the appropriation process. "This means that when we do something for the first time, when we apply a new program or a new method, for example, although we are never exempted from our obligations, there must be recognition that there is a learning curve. It applies to managers, to teachers, even to the Minister! Together, we will allow ourselves the time and give ourselves the means to do things better and better."

Another key element recognized: teachers' professional practice is largely dependent on their professional autonomy. In other words, it is up to teachers to choose their instructional methods and learning situations. "Practices vary according to the level of education, the subject content, the characteristics of the students and the personality of the teacher," Bergevin explained. "All methods and approaches can be used, as this is part of the teacher's professional choice. Of course, students must play an active role in their learning, but it is the teacher who determines in what way they will be active."

It is also understood that the education reform will not be applied in the same way at the secondary level as at the elementary level, for several reasons. First, because students are not the same age, which affects their ways of learning and being. Second, because the subject content is of a different nature, with students learning increasingly specific and complex concepts. Finally, because work is not organized in the same way. "When you're a homeroom teacher in elementary school, you have, on average, 25 students in front of you, who you see 20 hours a week," said Bergevin. "When you're a teacher in secondary school, you deal with over 100 students but you see them each just a few hours a week. It is virtually impossible to have an intimate knowledge of each student's capacity to develop his or her competencies. So obviously, we cannot expect teachers to do things exactly the same way in secondary as in elementary." There is no doubt that secondary school, with its own culture and characteristics, will present new challenges.

A shared responsibility

Implementing this education reform is a shared responsibility, Bergevin stated. "There are responsibilities that belong to the Minister, as the population's political representative. He must still make decisions that are in the best interest of the students under his mandate. It is the Minister's job to make sure that policies and laws are passed, to allocate budgets to the school network and to create the conditions that will facilitate the realization of the education reform. Some responsibilities are up to the school boards, such as analyzing the needs of their schools, training their personnel and sharing material and human resources. Other responsibilities are up to the schools: supporting and training their staff, communicating with parents, and exercising leadership. Finally, teachers have a responsibility for their own education and that of their students."

"This is a renovation of Québec schools, an ambitious renewal that was both essential and unavoidable in order to continue preparing our children to function and to fulfill their potential in 21st century society," Bergevin concluded. "It is a challenge that is both extraordinary and demanding. Together, we can do this. Some days will be harder than others, but you must remember that you are never alone. We are all working together toward a common goal."

FOR MORE INFORMATION

The following documents are available on-line:

The Education Reform—The Changes Under Way
http://www.mels.gouv.qc.ca/lancement/Renouveau_ped/

Monitoring the Education Reform
(the 12 recommendations of the Table de pilotage sur le renouveau pédagogique)
http://www.mels.gouv.qc.ca/lancement/renouveaupedagogique/

Update on Secondary Cycle Two

Pascale Sauvé

The content of the subject-specific programs has been validated by committees made up of teachers, education consultants and school administrators from across Québec who are in their classrooms, schools and school boards on a daily basis," Bergevin explained. "These people have agreed to come to the Ministère every two months, for a two-year period, to examine the production of the program concerning them, to critique and comment on it, and to make recommendations that will enable us to make adjustments according to the reality in the field. All this is done in collaboration with education specialists, courseware designers and school managers, and that's really important."

In keeping with the QEP for elementary school and Secondary Cycle One, the QEP for Secondary Cycle Two follows a competency-based approach. "This approach was not chosen arbitrarily," Bergevin reminded participants. "Even though we're dealing with social sciences and even though, contrary to hard sciences, there are always grey areas, there are still a certain number of things that we know. The science of education exists and has solid foundations. And cognitive science, for example, has shown that to learn something new, to progress in the development of our essential knowledge and competencies, we need to be confronted with a challenge. But it must be a realistic challenge, one that we can meet by drawing on our previous knowledge, by using our reasoning and our judgment, alone or with our peers, to find answers to the problems raised. That is how we learn and progress; it is fundamental." The competency-based approach therefore not only enables students to acquire essential knowledge, but it ensures that they know when and how to use that knowledge, which is essential in today's complex world.

Learning Paths

Pascale Sauvé

General education paths

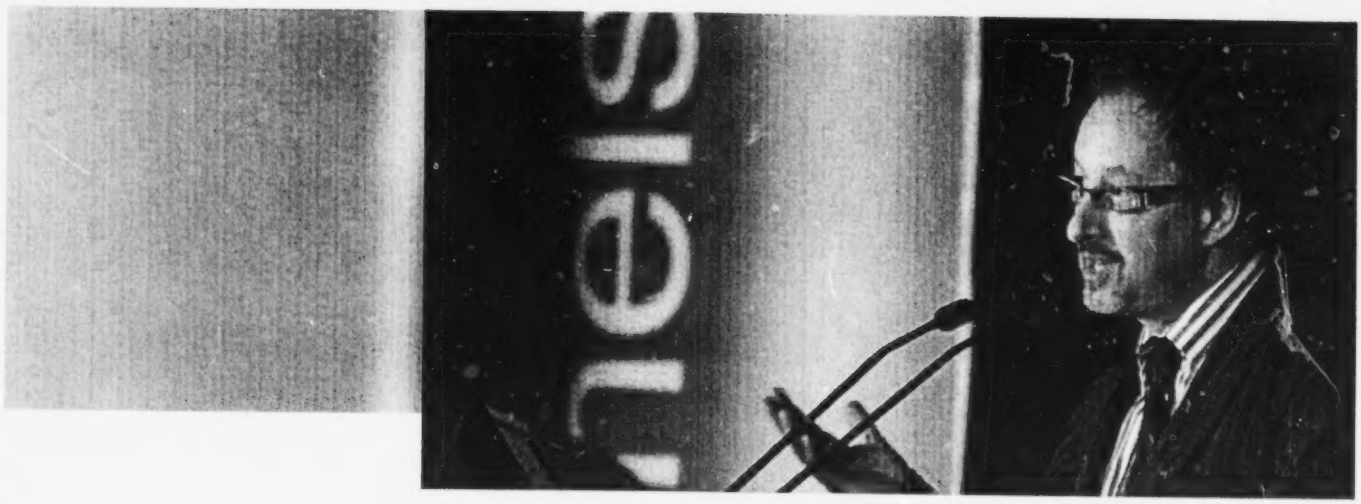
In accordance with the new *Basic school regulation for preschool, elementary and secondary education*, starting with the 2007-2008 school year, students in Secondary Cycle Two will have to choose between two paths: the general education path and the applied general education path.

The two paths have many points in common. They both offer a general education which, for the most part, includes the same subjects: language of instruction; second language; Mathematics; History and Citizenship Education; Contemporary Economic Environment; Physical Education and Health; Arts Education; Ethics and Religious Culture; and the Integrative Project in Secondary V. Students will also have a choice of differentiated programs within the learning path they have chosen, according to their strengths and interests. In Mathematics, for example, students have three options: the *Cultural, Social and Technical* option, the *Technical and Scientific* option and the *Science* option. In Français, langue seconde, students can choose either the core or the enriched program. Students also get to choose electives throughout the cycle, for example, by deciding to concentrate on science, art or history. "You could call it a guidance-oriented cycle, because students can explore and make choices that will affect their career path," explained Gérard Guimont, Director of Programs.

Both the general education path and the applied general education path lead to a secondary school diploma, giving students access to college-level education, or to vocational training in Secondary IV or V without having to meet any additional requirements. "Both paths are therefore on the same level," Guimont added. "There isn't one path for weaker students or those thinking of dropping out, and one for stronger students. The paths have been designed to better meet students' needs and interests and to offer different subject menus, so as to respect their diversity."

However, there are some differences between the two paths. First, students in the general education path will take the Science and Technology program, while those in applied general education will take Applied Science and Technology. "In the Science and Technology

Work-oriented training path



Gérard Guimont, Director of Programs

program, generally speaking, students first learn the concepts and then study the applications, while in Applied Science and Technology, they do the reverse, going from hands-on experimentation to examining the underlying concepts," Guimont summarized. "About 60 per cent of the content is the same in both programs. The same fundamental concepts are addressed, and the two programs target the development of the same competencies, with just one different component. As well, both programs offer Secondary V science electives (in chemistry and physics, for example)."

In addition to Applied Science and Technology, the Personal Orientation Project (POP) will also be compulsory for students in the applied general education path. "The POP supports and completes the guidance-oriented approach of Secondary Cycle One," Guimont explained. "For the applied general education path, it seemed that vocational orientation provided an interesting entry point for many students who, without necessarily being weaker than other students, may lack motivation or are unsure of their interests." POP is an innovative program based on action-oriented guidance. Through simulations and practical exercises, students will have a chance to explore various trades and professions, according to their fields of interest. With the help of the teacher, each student will plan and carry out his or her own process of career exploration. "It will be challenging for teachers," he noted, "as they will have to support and guide students carrying out all kinds of different projects." A Web site designed specifically for the POP will provide students with a vast directory of digital experiential tools.

"We have been field-testing the program for the last three years in four schools," said Guimont, "and it has proven very successful. It is a program that supports the student's academic and vocational project." Schools that offer the applied general education path must also offer the options Exploration of Vocational Training and Entrepreneurship. These two programs of study and the POP are open to students in the general education path as well.

For students who change their mind along the way, switching from one path to another is simple. "Regardless of the path students choose at the beginning of the cycle, they will never find themselves at a dead end. Any student can easily switch from one path to the other at the end of the first year of the cycle, without being penalized."

In terms of school organization, the decision to offer both the general education path and the applied general education path is up to the school board. "It is not a legal obligation for every school to offer all programs," Guimont specified. "This being said, funds for purchasing materials and setting up the required facilities have been set aside for all 407 secondary schools in Québec. All the conditions have been put in place to enable as many schools as possible to offer both general education paths."

Work-oriented training path

In Secondary Cycle Two, students who are having serious difficulties and who are interested in entering the job market more quickly can follow the work-oriented training path, choosing one of two options—prework training or training for a semiskilled trade—if either of these options is more likely to meet the student's

interests, needs and abilities. "In effect, these options replace Life Skills and Work Skills Education and the programs leading to an Attestation of Vocational Education ("Volet 2" leading to an AVE)," explained Liette Picard, Director of Special Education.

With the arrival of the education reform, the *Policy on Special Education* was modified in 2000. "One of the key orientations of the Policy is that educational success has different meanings depending on the abilities and needs of each student, and that this success can be recognized using different methods. We're aiming to have as many students as possible succeed, so we can't just throw up our hands with students in difficulty. On the contrary, we have to double our efforts to help them progress. We have to ask ourselves what we're doing now with our students to help them succeed," said the director.

"In a study of the Life Skills and Work Skills Education programs in 2002, we saw that this training contained some very positive aspects—such as the work-study approach, which was widely appreciated and did a good job of meeting the needs of many students with serious learning difficulties," said Picard. "Yet we also noted several deficiencies: roughly 50 per cent of students abandoned the program after the first year; as well, the program was very unequal from one school to another. We realized that students in Life Skills and Work Skills Education were doing the exact same internships as students in programs leading to an Attestation of Vocational Education ("Volet 2" leading to an AVE), yet they weren't getting the same recognition, which was rather demotivating."

These observations led to the creation of a path that seeks to help students fulfill their potential by going as far as they can. "What we're proposing with this path is a broader basic education, more rigorous evaluation (using the scales of competency levels), more consistent certification and access to more advanced training," said Picard. One shortcoming that had long been noted in life and work skills education was that it often led to a dead-end, with little access to other types of training. "What is interesting now is that we are offering training for a semiskilled trade in the youth sector. All school boards will therefore have the obligation to offer access to semiskilled trades, which was not the case before."

Thus, the work-oriented training path is a Secondary Cycle Two path that targets development of the same competencies as students in the other paths. There is, however, one important difference. "It is a general education, but intended for work-oriented training and the students thus targeted," noted Picard. "Therefore, it has been designed to be more hands-on and more meaningful to this clientele." The training encompasses the subject-specific competencies, the cross-curricular competencies and the broad areas of learning, with particular emphasis on career development. This path also offers practical training in the workplace. Finally, it provides access to more complex training, from prework training to training for a semiskilled trade, and from training for a semiskilled trade to training leading to a Diploma of Vocational Studies. "We want to change people's automatic reflexes and help students go further. That's why we've opened the doors and created bridges that did not exist before. Our goal is to prepare students as best we can to lead active lives as people, citizens and workers," said Picard.

Breaking the stereotype

A student who is at least 15 years of age on September 30 of the school year in which he or she begins the training may enroll in either training path, if the student's competency report or individualized education plan shows that the training path is most likely to meet the student's interests, needs and abilities. "It is important to break the stereotype that all students with learning difficulties will automatically go into the work-oriented training path," said Picard. "Some students may continue their general education, if that is in their best interest, with some specific support measures. However, we think that many young people will choose the work-oriented training path because it offers an attractive qualification." Students must also meet the special requirements for admission into one or the other of these training programs.

Thus, students may be admitted to the prework training program if their competency report reveals that they have not achieved the objectives of the elementary-level programs of studies for language of instruction and mathematics. "In other words, this program is for students experiencing major difficulties," Picard explained. "It is a three-year program with a broad general education (language of instruction; second language; Mathematics; Technological and Scientific Experimentation; Geography, History and Citizenship Education; Physical Education and Health; Autonomy and Social Participation) and a strong practical component. In addition, the directory of semiskilled trades and their

related competencies has been revised to ensure that both the simple and the complex competencies needed for a solid training leading to a qualification can be easily identified."

The first year of practical training focuses on introducing students to the world of work (World of Work Orientation), while in the second and third years, students carry out real tasks in the workplace, as part of the Life Skills and Work Skills Education program. One of the prework training programs of study helps students get to know themselves better and to develop a vocational plan. In terms of certification, on the recommendation of the school board, the Minister awards a prework training certificate to students who have completed this training of not less than 2 700 hours and who have successfully completed the Life Skills and Work Skills Education program of not less than 900 hours. In their third year, students in the prework training program can switch to the training for a semiskilled trade, if they meet all special requirements.

Students who have achieved the objectives of the elementary-level programs of study for language of instruction and mathematics, but who have not earned the Secondary Cycle One credits in those subjects, are eligible for the training for a semiskilled trade. They must also meet the special requirements of the program leading to the desired occupation (such as a driver's licence). "This is a one-year program," said Picard. "Teachers use the Secondary Cycle One QEP for the core subjects (language of instruction, second language and Mathematics). The practical training component consists of 375 hours of preparation for a semiskilled trade and 75 hours of Introduction to the World of Work."

In this case, on the recommendation of the school board, the Minister awards a training certificate for a semiskilled trade, with mention of the trade, to students who have completed the training of not less than 900 hours and successfully completed the practical training component for the semiskilled trade of not less than 450 hours. "Then, if students meet the special requirements, they can go into vocational training," Picard continued. "We're working with the staff at the Direction de la formation professionnelle to establish the special requirements for admission to the vocational training programs in question."

Validation continues

Work is continuing to finish the programs of study for the work-oriented training path, including the development and validation of the subject-specific and optional programs for the prework training program. "We are currently working with people in the field as well as with regional partners and experts to field-test the programs and the learning and evaluation situations, in preparation for the path's implementation in September 2007. However, in 2007, we will still be trying these programs out, so as to make any necessary adjustments over the next few years." Simulations are now being carried out to determine how these programs can be implemented in different kinds of schools, particularly small ones. Professional development on the work-oriented training path will be offered in all regions in May 2007. Schools will also have access to tools such as a directory of semiskilled occupations and a guide to organizing practicums.

Picard notes that transitional measures have been set up, for example, for students who are 16 years of age and who would have been eligible for Life Skills and Work Skills Education in 2007, so that school boards can offer these students a program leading to a job and issue them an attestation. "You could call it a transitional life and work skills program; it will be a two-year program consisting of 800 hours of practical training, where schools can use the current programs or the new ones, as they choose," Picard explained. As well, students who have started a program leading to an Attestation of Vocational Education (AVE) before June 30, 2007, will be able to complete that training.

As to whether students who are 15 years of age and have obtained their Secondary Cycle One credits can enroll in the work-oriented training path, Picard reminds us that "our goal is for students to push their limits and obtain the best qualification possible. For these students, who have acquired a solid basic education, ideally we would want to direct them toward either the general education path or the applied general education path, according to their needs, with support measures if required. Then, in Secondary IV they would have the option of taking vocational training that could lead to a Diploma of Vocational Studies. In short, our aim is always to bring students as far as possible, toward a higher qualification, and we are trying to make that possible!"

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Consult the following Web sites and documents:

Web site of the Direction générale de la formation des jeunes
http://www.mels.gouv.qc.ca/DGFJ/

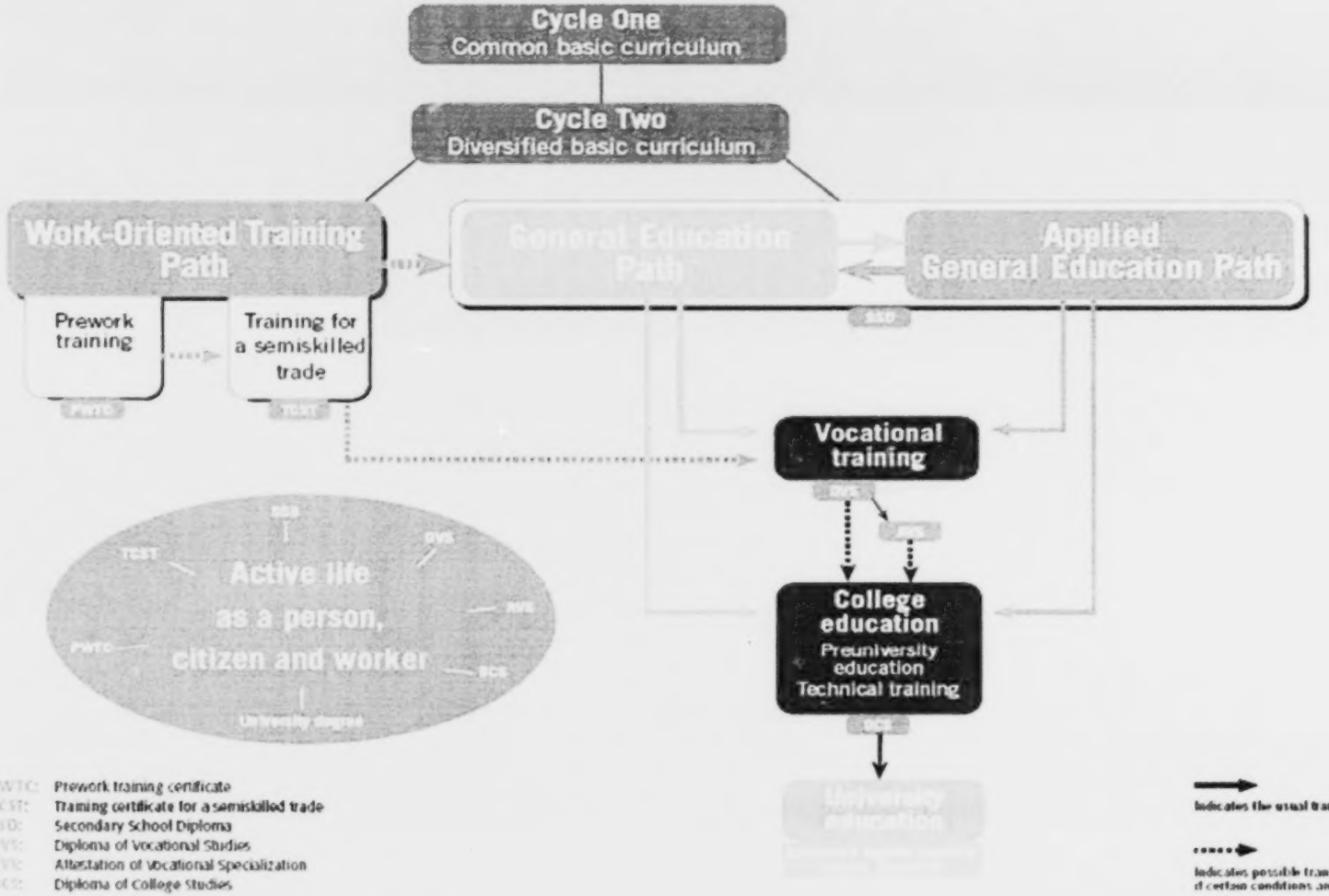
Web site of the Direction de l'adaptation scolaire
http://www.mels.gouv.qc.ca/DGFJ/das/

Québec Education Program for Secondary Cycle Two, general education path and applied general education path
http://documents.educationquebec.qc.ca/programmes/
User name: cycle
Password: mozart05

Web site of the Personal Orientation Project (POP)
http://www.repertoireppo.qc.ca

Science and technology site of the Centre de développement pédagogique
http://www.cslaval.qc.ca/CDP/

LEARNING PATHS IN THE YOUTH SECTOR



Margaret Rioux-Dolan, Director
Direction générale de la formation des jeunes

Preparing for Implementation

Pascale Sauvé

Specialized classrooms

The implementation of the reform in Secondary Cycle Two will bring about major changes in schools, as diversified paths are introduced along with new science and technology programs. In particular, some classroom facilities will change. "We have worked alongside the Direction générale du financement et des équipements to prepare information documents that give more details on these questions, and to develop strategies to support school boards," says Margaret Rioux-Dolan, Director of the Direction de la formation générale des jeunes. "Our goal is to help school boards pinpoint needs, and then to facilitate their work to change physical layouts and acquire materials."

In its information documents, the Ministère sets out the basic principles for calculating the amount of financial assistance available to school boards for physical changes to Secondary Cycle Two classrooms. The amount of assistance is established taking into account the fact that classrooms that were assigned to certain subjects, such as Home Economics and Introduction to Technology, will be reassigned to new subjects and renovated accordingly. In 2006-2007, the Ministère paid out a portion of the full amount for classroom renovations as well as part of the total required for materials and equipment–in all, 25 per cent of the amount allocated to school boards. A total of $84.3 million was distributed. In 2007-2008, a second payment will be made to finalize the purchase of new materials, covering 75 per cent of the basic

cost, and a further amount will help school boards extend schools where space is at a premium.

Work on the information documents has been completed and they have been available on the MELS Web site since last May, under the Direction générale du financement et de l'équipement tab. They include a description of the new paths and their impact on classroom facilities, as well as information on old classrooms no longer in use and on new facilities that are required for the reform. There are also descriptive sheets on various topics, and school profiles that account for the need to redesign or renovate classrooms. The Ministère held a meeting last spring to present the information documents to school boards. In addition, the Direction générale du financement et de l'équipement has continued to meet with schools to answer questions and respond to specific needs.

School organization

For some time now, the Direction générale de la formation des jeunes has been working closely with the Direction des relations de travail to find the best possible ways to facilitate the implementation of the reform. "I think that at present there are some important levers that can be used to implement the reform and gain the flexibility needed for an organizational approach that makes it easier to support students and staff," says Rioux-Dolan. The Direction générale des relations de travail has just organized an information day for school administrators on this topic.

With regard to the collective agreement, she points out some key issues. "The whole question of finding time to work together and for professional development is often raised as a difficulty, but we do have resources." She mentions the professional development days in the youth sector and the possibility of organizing meetings. This teamwork time can be used for meetings of the cycle team, school team or multidisciplinary team to develop projects. "In addition, when the collective agreement was adopted, the list and subject areas were revised to reflect the new curriculum defined by the Basic School Regulation and to take into account the basic training required to teach the new programs," she states.

With respect to special education, an extra $90 million in funding has been allocated, in particular to add resource teachers at the elementary and secondary levels. Another $30 million has been allocated to maintain professional staff members at the secondary level and support students with behavioural difficulties. "Taken together, these measures are intended to promote student success and reduce the dropout and grade-repetition rates," she specifies.

Approval of secondary school textbooks

There have been a number of developments regarding the approval of instructional materials in the context of implementing the Québec Education Program in the second year of Secondary Cycle One.

To begin with, from two to four textbooks were approved in time for the start of the current school year for each subject requiring this type of material. This was made possible through close collaboration by the Bureau d'approbation du matériel didactique (BAMD), the Association nationale des éditeurs de livres (ANEL) and the Comité-conseil sur l'évaluation des ressources didactiques (CCERD).

These parties agreed to focus solely on the approval of textbooks at first. Publishers promised, however, to provide schools with excerpts from teaching guides so that school personnel could begin the year with the necessary tools. Proceeding in this fashion made it possible to meet the needs of teachers without jeopardizing the thoroughness of the evaluation and approval process.

Collaboration is continuing in order to provide schools with textbooks for the implementation of programs in the first year of Cycle Two next fall. The process will be similar to the one followed for Cycle One materials, taking into account the time required to produce complete packages of instructional materials.

Textbooks will also be required for the implementation of the Ethics and Religious Culture program in the fall of 2008. It will be a big challenge for publishers to produce instructional materials and submit them for approval, given that all the cycles in this subject must be covered, in both elementary and secondary school.

It should be noted that the above information applies specifically to the French sector. In the English sector, steps are being taken to provide approved materials for the elementary level and Secondary Cycle One. Major efforts have been under way since 2005, in collaboration with the English education community.

Thanks to the funding provided under the Canada-Québec Agreement, instructional packages for Social Sciences, Mathematics and Science and Technology are currently being translated or adapted for use at the elementary level. The first of these materials should be approved for the start of the 2007-2008 school year.

For Secondary Cycle One, a similar process is under way with regard to the translation of two instructional packages for each of the following subjects: History and Citizenship Education, Geography, Science and Technology, and Mathematics.

It is safe to say that no effort is being spared to provide teachers with a variety of quality tools to meet their expectations and needs.

Funding for the reform

"There has been a lot of discussion and consultation between the sectors about funding, because obviously the money has to be there to organize the services," says Rioux-Dolan.

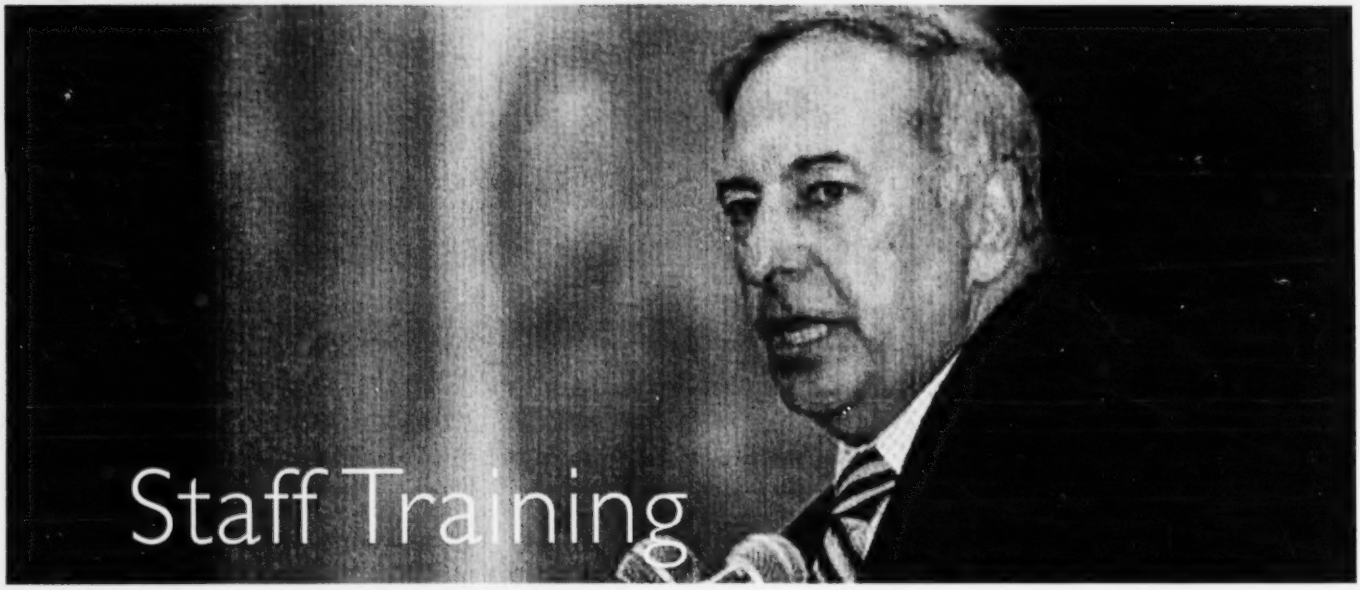
The current 2006-2007 budget already takes into account various elements of the reform, including the elimination of certain subjects, resulting in changes to Secondary Cycle One. The same will apply for Secondary III next year. This year, $8.1 million was added to hire 200 technicians to work in science and technology labs. Moreover, from 2007 to 2010, $8.1 million will be added each year to increase the number of technicians to 800 to meet the ratio of one technician for every two science and technology teachers. An amount of $28.6 million will be available to replace computers in secondary schools, especially for the work-oriented training path and the personal orientation project.

"The current financial priority is the introduction of diversified paths in Secondary Cycle Two," says Rioux-Dolan. "At the moment, we are well aware that the resources have not yet been determined for each path and that even the allocation criteria have not been established." Several questions are currently on the table. For the work-oriented training path, various committees are evaluating the cost of nondurable materials and the cost of practical training (travel costs for outside trips, practicums, teacher training and funding for small groups). For the general education and applied general education paths, the special needs created by splitting each age cohort into two, thereby increasing the difficulties faced by smaller schools, are being examined. Discussions have also begun concerning additional resources to increase the number of technicians and replace the nondurable materials used for personal orientation projects.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

See the following Web site:

Direction générale du financement et de l'équipement.
http://www.mels.gouv.qc.ca/dgfe/



Staff Training

Pascale Sauvé

I would like to point out that staff training is a shared responsibility. The Ministère, the school boards and the schools are the co-pilots for the implementation of the reform and for training."

Bergevin wants to be clear. "I must specify certain elements, and as always I will do so with all due respect for the teaching profession. There is a section in the *Education Act* that I consider extremely important. It states that teachers are required to remain informed, acquire training and maintain their skills at as high a level as possible throughout their working lives. Primarily, then, this is an obligation and a duty incumbent on teachers." Next, the principal and the school board have other important responsibilities concerning staff training, since they must identify needs, allocate budgets and organize training. "At the Ministère, we are responsible for providing the information and tools needed for training," specifies the assistant deputy minister. "But the Ministère cannot be held responsible for training all staff in all schools. As a co-piloi, it is our obligation and duty to ensure that at each school board and private school, there are people who have been informed and trained by us that can relay the training in their own environment. That is our responsibility." This is why the Ministère has organized, for the last eight years, province-wide training sessions for administrators and resource persons, in addition to various specific training sessions to meet specific needs and requests from schools—such as this professional development tour.

In 2002, the teachers' unions and the Québec government signed an agreement on the number of hours worked by teachers. The agreement recognized a 40-hour working week for teachers, and the teachers agreed to be present at school for 32 hours per week. The agreement was signed to establish the conditions needed to facilitate discussion, cooperation and teamwork. "I would like to point out that the agreement was signed voluntarily by both parties, and that it is one of the elements that will help us implement the reform," says Bergevin.

"There are, obviously, some programs that will require more investment than others." They include the Science and Technology programs that have been extensively reworked and now require key scientific concepts to be transferred to technological applications, a new departure. More training sessions will be required. Another example is the Ethics and Religious Culture program. "This is an ambitious program for nondenominational schools that want to present the key values underlying the major religions recognized worldwide. This is no mean task," says Bergevin. "Not many people have the education and training needed for an in-depth understanding of all the major religions. This is a complex issue and, once again, training is crucial." Staff will also need training in the new work-oriented training path, for which the training plans will have to be reviewed.

Eve Krakow

The English-language subject-specific orientation sessions, the English equivalent of the *formations disciplinaires*, will be offered in all subject areas, and jointly coordinated by the Secteur des services à la communauté anglophone (SSCA) and the Leading English Education and Resource Network (LEARN).

The sessions focus on how to implement the Québec Education Program in elementary and secondary school. While some English-language sessions were offered in previous years, sessions are now being offered in all subject areas. Some sessions may be provided in the regions by request, while others are at predetermined times and places.

This offer of service, sent to all English school boards and private school associations in the fall, comes in response to requests from schools and school boards to provide the training designed by the Direction générale de la formation des jeunes (DGFJ) to English-language resource persons, so that they in turn can provide training within their own jurisdictions. The SSCA is working with various units within the MELS to translate and adapt the content of these orientation sessions into English, while LEARN is coordinating the delivery of these sessions. LEARN and resources in the education community will be giving the training throughout the 2006-2007 school year.

For more information, please contact your school board or association.

A New Approach to Meet the Challenges of a New Century

19th Province-Wide Meeting on the Reform

Marie-Josée Lépine

Today, there can be no doubt as to whether or not the reform should continue. Pierre Bergevin, Assistant Deputy Minister for preschool, elementary and secondary education, used the opening address to reaffirm the Ministère's intention to continue with the implementation and consolidation of the reform. "Québec made the right choice," he said, "when it decided to transform its education system to ensure that young people receive the instruction they need to meet the challenges of the 21st century. Their training will enable them to meet new challenges throughout their lives."

In a speech entitled *Enjeux collectifs et actions éducatives* (collective issues and educational actions), Claude Corbo, a professor at Université du Québec à Montréal, reflected on the challenges evoked by Bergevin—that is, the local and planetary social issues that involve the school system. To help the education community, Corbo then listed ways to structure its educational actions.

From the outset, educational actions must be directed to reflect the community they serve. North America's democratic society, where the economic model is based on consumption, has had a clear influence on schools. According to Corbo, "Young people arriving in school are already marked by the ideals and values of our society. They aspire strongly toward happiness and the instant satisfaction of their desires. The attitudes and values developed by our society work against some of the natural requirements of a school system: sustained effort, constant work, etc. Our educational actions must take this reality into account."

In addition, the international context must be considered. Corbo identified three worldwide trends that have a direct influence on our educational actions: globalization, the ongoing development of science and technology, and cultural transformations. Globalization has imposed increasingly stringent requirements of competitiveness and productivity. "Academic failure condemns the individual concerned to a life of perpetual economic powerlessness," he pointed out.

"Science and technology," continued Corbo, "will be an increasingly central factor in a country's productivity and competitiveness." The pace of change in science and technology requires a strong ability to adapt. "Only close familiarity with the world of science and technology will preserve the economic prosperity and dignity of individuals, if they are to understand often complex social issues."

Last, ongoing cultural transformations are of particular concern to Québec, as a minority society within North America. "Cultural transformations result from two apparently contradictory phenomena: the mixing of cultures and the blending of cultures. One dominant culture is placing pressure on all other cultures. We must deal with the integration of a range of cultural influences. In addition, over the last half century, Québec society has undergone a series of profound changes, such as the collapse of religion and the ethnic and cultural diversification of the population, leading to a loss of cultural references. We must find ways to help young people forge an attachment to their heritage; knowing where they come from, they will know who they are and who they may become."

How should these factors be dealt with in our educational actions? According to Corbo, "You must continually remind everyone brought together by the school system of its designated objectives—instruction, socialization and qualification—and ensure that they govern the choices made, the actions taken and the efforts deployed. These objectives are directly linked to the major trends shaping the future of our society and enable us to face the effects of globalization, the development of science and technology and cultural mutations."

To combat the loss of cultural references, schools must work to convey values. "The values that schools convey through their mission of socialization must be promoted ceaselessly. Schools must focus on identity-based and sociopolitical values, as well as on those specifically linked to school activities such as the thirst for knowledge, the quest for truth, tenacity, effort and patience."

Last, educational actions must also help develop collaboration and complicity within the community. "It is imperative," suggested Corbo, "to involve other resources in the community, such as the CLSC and community groups, that are able to provide training and information that lie outside the school's purview."

New approaches to pedagogical organization: ends and means

To meet these social issues and challenges, schools must change their practices and organization. Learning cycles appear to be one of the solutions needed to deal with the new realities. During the two-day meeting, Johanne Vaillancourt, principal of the Augustin-Norbert-Morin secondary school in the Commission scolaire des Laurentides, and Jacques Tardif, professor at the Université de Sherbrooke, presented a reference framework for a learning-cycle-based approach drawn up by a research team as part of an action research study conducted by the Laval, Laurentides and Lanaudière regional office of the MELS (2000-2004).

Although this type of structure requires organizational adjustments, there are many advantages for students. Vaillancourt and Tardif pointed out that it allows a higher degree of coherence between types of learning, a diversification of training paths and respect for the learning pace and style of each student.

Similarly, Suzanne Desjardins, coordinator at the Laval, Laurentides and Lanaudière regional office, and Claire Desrosiers, former principal of the Cap-Jeunesse secondary school under the Commission scolaire de la Rivière-du-Nord, presented a project on the cycle-based organization of learning used in the school boards of the Laval, Laurentides and Lanaudière region.

A regional committee formed to reflect on and experiment with learning cycles in Secondary Cycle One quickly concluded that this type of organization was necessary. "Basically, what we found was that a cycle-based organization was the ideal structure for meeting all the requirements of competency development, differentiated instruction and collegial management of student groups," said Desjardins.

To make a smooth transition from programs based on academic years to programs based on learning cycles, classroom time must be organized differently, both to meet the requirements of subject-specific and cross-curricular competency development, and to adapt teaching to a range of student needs and interests. The objective was, first, to create more time for teachers to work in teams and identify promising student activities and, second, to find time for students to benefit from the activities defined by the teaching team.

At the secondary school administered by Claire Desrosiers, "family teams" were set up. These are stable teams of teachers from different subject areas who work together with four student groups. The reorganization of the timetable allowed the family teams to gather for four periods per cycle in the timetable, in a half-day block. Depending on the needs, all topics could be discussed, but there were priorities, such as pedagogical projects, supervision, and follow-up with families.

The new organization has led students to develop a sense of belonging, in particular because of increased follow-up by their teachers. As Desrosiers points out, "The reorganization allowed us to diversify our practices, share our competencies, integrate at-risk students and ensure better follow-up for their needs. By meeting as a 'family,' it is also possible to gain an overview of each learner and to list the best intervention approaches." The teachers were also able to share working tools and develop a collegial culture.

Gradually, to give students access to the projects developed by the various families, the team led by Desrosiers decided to change the timetable to introduce free periods where the content was managed within the family. "This is our response to differentiated instruction," says Desrosiers. "We can form enrichment groups or remedial groups, invite guest speakers, and so on."

However, it is an organizational challenge to introduce free periods into a timetable. The solution adopted at the Cap-Jeunesse school, developed in collaboration with the Société GRICS, involves scheduling two free periods per 10-day cycle. The time saved is recovered to offer students training and learning activities to meet their needs.

In response to the range of situations in different schools, other timetabling models may be used. For example, in a nine-day model with four periods per day, each period can be shortened by 15 minutes to create a one-hour free period each day. However, the speakers noted that "this approach must be worked out with the teachers, to decide the subjects where time can be gained."

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Consult the following Web site:

http://documents.educationquebec.qc.ca/gestionnaires
User name: rencontre
Password: couleur56

"Basically, what we found was that a cycle-based organization was the ideal structure for meeting all the requirements of competency development, differentiated instruction and collegial management of student groups," said Desjardins.

When the activities are decided, a teacher may register his or her students for one or more activities to meet their educational needs. In the remaining time, students can make their own choices depending on their interests. By offering choices for students, including those on special paths, their motivation may be increased.

Desjardins made one last point. "Timetable changes are a means to an end, and not an end in themselves. They allow the school team to move ahead." Timetable changes must be designed to facilitate the implementation of a specific project.

For the various Secondary Cycle Two paths that will be implemented next September, the Société GRICS presented some optimistic results from the research conducted in March 2006 using a simulation of how the new learning paths will be integrated into the timetable. The experiment involved Secondary III students in three schools of different sizes. Pauline Martin, director of pedagogical systems training and support at GRICS, and Russel Gilbert, GPI representative with the same organization, stressed that they were able to introduce the paths and, in fact, encountered no major difficulties.

A reminder of some of the guidelines for flexible, diversified timetabling presented by Margaret Rioux-Dolan, Director General, Liette Picard, Director of Special Education, Laila Valin, Director of Evaluation, and Gérard Guimont, Director of Programs, calmed some anxieties and helped the participants begin their analysis of the case studies with more confidence. For more information on the guidelines, see the article "Preparing for Implementation" (page 8.2), which presents a complete overview of the question.

Launching the Québec Education Program for Secondary Cycle Two

Meeting of the Program Development Committees

Eve Krakow

To ensure the success of the greatest number of students possible and the prosperity of Québec in this century of innovation, I am deeply convinced that we must continue to implement the Québec Education Program in secondary school," stated Jean-Marc Fournier, Minister of Education, Recreation and Sports.

The Minister was addressing the members of the program development committees for Secondary Cycle Two at a meeting on October 16, 2006, in Montreal. "I would like to reiterate my admiration for the professionalism of Québec's teachers and to underline their contribution to the advancement of this great collective undertaking that is the education reform," he continued. "I feel privileged to be able to count on partners of their calibre."

Pierre Bergevin, Assistant Deputy Minister for preschool, elementary and secondary education, spoke in similar terms. "Many people think the new programs are produced by the Ministry, in isolation from the real world. But in reality, they are developed and validated by men and women like you: people who work in the schools on a daily basis. And I would like to personally thank you for all your tremendous hard work."

The program development committees included teachers, education consultants and school principals, as well as MELS representatives and professionals in special education, evaluation and complementary educational services. The purpose of the one-day October meeting was to acknowledge their work, to bring them together to review the final version as approved by the Minister, and to take stock of their experience participating in this endeavour.

The reform in action

It was also a chance for teachers and students from five secondary schools across Québec to share some of their experiences with the QEP in Secondary Cycle One. To this end, participants first watched a video entitled "Le renouveau pedagogique en action," produced by Pascale Marcotte for the Direction générale de la formation des jeunes.

Project leader Francine Payette and her team had visited five schools to see how the reform was being applied in Secondary I. The result was an inspiring video featuring teachers and students in five different subjects who shared learning and evaluation situations they had carried out in their classrooms. After the video presentation, these same teachers and students were on hand to further discuss the experience and answer questions.

In mathematics, for example, students at the École d'Éducation Internationale de Laval pretended they were moving into their own apartment with a roommate. They were given a budget and a list of compulsory items and tasks. Choosing items from flyers they had collected as well as on-line catalogues, students had to furnish the apartment, pay rent and utilities, buy groceries and clothing, etc. Percentages and decimals were just some of the mathematical concepts they used to calculate taxes and tally their expenses. "It was a lot more fun and interesting than just doing exercises in a textbook," said one student. "We saw that [mathematics] serves a purpose."

Mathematics teacher Nicolas Therrien explained how the QEP has changed his practices. "Before, I might have done a few situations, and then at the end of the term, I'd give an exam. Now I use the learning situations to make a judgment on my students' development. The students learn as much if not more, because they need their new knowledge to do the situations."

In English as a Second Language, students at École Docteur-Alexis-Bouthillier (Commission scolaire des Hautes Rivières) made a film—but they had to learn all the English terminology and speak in English only throughout the entire process of planning, scriptwriting, filming, editing (using computer software) and presenting. At the end of the year, these students from the French-speaking area of Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu went on a trip to New York. "Now I can understand people, and I can answer them when they talk to me!" said one student proudly.

In music, students at École Les Seigneuries (Commission scolaire de La Riveraine) created their own jingle. "Many music teachers think the competency *Creates musical works* is a waste of time," said music teacher Isabelle Fillion. "But it allows for so many opportunities. In the process of creating, students learn how to use their instruments and develop their own personal way of doing things. So when it comes time to performing or appreciating a work, they have much more knowledge at their disposal." Students said that in creating the jingle, they learned to write a musical score and to apply the theory they had studied, such as the duration of notes and the use of melody and repetition.

"It's very important to thoroughly plan all the steps—preparation, realization and integration," Fillion added. "Too often, we hear people say, 'You're just doing projects, you're not teaching anymore.' That's just not true. I still give lectures. I still have notions, content, knowledge, concepts and strategies to teach, especially in the preparation phase. But if you plan your learning and evaluation situation well, then automatically, students will have no choice but to mobilize their knowledge, concepts and strategies."

Recommendations implemented

The day continued with brief testimonials by Annie Gélinas, a mathematics teacher representing the program writers in the room, as well as the principal and two teachers from École secondaire de Chambly, a pilot school for Secondary Cycle Two. This was followed by small-group sessions in which the project development committees reviewed the final, approved version of their programs and discussed their experience as participants in the process.

At the end of the day, Minister Fournier thanked everyone for their hard work. He also outlined the concrete steps the government is taking to implement the recommendations tabled in August by the Table de pilotage du renouveau pédagogique, a committee composed of representatives from the MELS and its main partners in education—teachers, parents, school administrators, school boards, private schools and universities—whose mandate is to identify issues and obstacles, take stock of the situation periodically and suggest adjustments. The 12 recommendations and actions being taken are presented in a document entitled "Monitoring the Education Reform," available on the MELS Web site:
www.mels.gouv.qc.ca/lancement/renouveaupedagogique.

Eve Krakow

Overall, she says, the writing has matured. "The introductory chapters contain the same elements that have been there since elementary, but go into much greater detail. In this respect, even teachers at the elementary level have something to gain by reading the first three chapters of the Secondary Cycle Two program."

As well, although the document's graphic presentation is still to be finalized, readers will notice several elements that make the QEP more user-friendly. A detailed table of contents at the start of each chapter makes items easy to find, while pull-quotes throughout the document highlight and summarize essential ideas.

Competency development

Perhaps the most important additions are the sections on competency development and the learning and evaluation situations that support this development in Chapter 1. The program now describes the three key aspects of competency development: mobilization of resources in a specific context, availability of these resources and reflection on the process. "These three aspects constitute the backbone of all learning and evaluation situations," Van Neste explained. "In addition to having students act in a given context, we have to consider the internal resources that students may need to develop and the external resources available to them. We have to plan time for feedback and reflection, which is important if students are to be able to transfer their learning to other contexts."

The writing team's work on competency development also led them to better define the role of resources—in particular, the role of knowledge as a resource. "This role is explained in even greater depth than in the Secondary Cycle One program, in particular in the sections on building up a repertoire of resources, the complementary nature of knowledge and competencies, providing meaningful and diversified situations, and supporting the progress of learning," said Van Neste.

The question of evaluation has also been clarified. "Although it is a compulsory program, not all the dimensions of the program are prescriptive in the same way. The school's obligations are now more clearly defined." For example, for the broad areas of learning, the purpose of evaluation is not to evaluate the students, but for the school to evaluate itself, in order to determine whether it is covering them meaningfully.

Finally, this introductory chapter describes the diversified learning paths specific to Secondary Cycle Two: general education, applied general education, and the work-oriented training path.

Broad areas of learning

Chapter 2 provides more details on how to incorporate the broad areas of learning into teaching and learning activities. "Many people seemed unclear on whether the broad areas of learning were compulsory. We have clarified their prescriptive nature," Van Neste noted. "We have presented them as focal points for the educational actions of teachers and nonteaching professionals, and insisted on the importance of integrating them into planning—although they can be spontaneous as well. They are the soil in which learning and evaluation situations are rooted."

Overall, there is continuity with the elementary level and Secondary Cycle One with respect to the broad areas of learning, although the focuses of development are more elaborate in Secondary Cycle Two. In particular, the collective aspect of each broad area of learning has been expanded. "In Health and Well-Being, for example, we added awareness of the consequences of collective choices on individual well-being. Many subjects will be able to make links to the broad areas of learning using this focus of development."

Cross-curricular competencies

In Chapter 3, more explanation is given on how to develop and evaluate the cross-curricular competencies. Van Neste notes that educators at all levels may be interested in reading the developmental profiles, which provide an overview of what can be expected of students for each competency, from elementary through to the end of secondary school. "These texts were written with the teachers in our program development teams," she added. "They told us what they see in the classroom, and just how much their students can do. We didn't just come up with these descriptions sitting in our offices."

Science and Technology: Two Different Programs for Two Different Paths

Marie Josée Lépine

Next September, students entering Secondary Cycle Two will choose from among three paths. In addition to the work-oriented training path, designed to direct students toward the labour market, there are two other possibilities: the general education path, which includes the Science and Technology program, and the applied general education path, which includes the Applied Science and Technology program.

"The two programs are non-identical twins," says Rochon. "The difference is in the initial context. In the Science and Technology program, the competency *Makes the most of his/her knowledge of science and technology* requires students to place a problem in context, define the related scientific and technological principles, and form an opinion. The same competency in Applied Science and Technology is developed as students examine applications in their context and analyse them to identify the scientific and technological principles and, potentially, carry out maintenance or repairs." She summarizes the situation as follows: "The Science and Technology program deals with problems, whereas the Applied Science and Technology program deals with applications."

Although the two contexts are different, students develop the same competencies and cover the same learning content. "The students are given two different ways to work," explains Rochon, "but the two ways are also comparable."

The two paths are of equal difficulty. "The examination at the end of Secondary IV is different for each program, but equivalent," Rochon insists. Whichever path is chosen, the options in Secondary V are the same. And should the need arise, students are free to switch paths between Secondary III and IV.

At the end of the meeting, the participants were invited to reflect on what their involvement in the program design process had brought them professionally. Many stated that it had given them a more global understanding of the program and more confidence in the reform. Above all, for many it was a professionally enriching experience. "It changed my teaching," says Jean Chrétien, an education consultant. "I got a lot out of it."

Abdelkrim Hasni, of the Université de Sherbrooke, who reviewed the program as a university expert, stated that for him the experience had been a revelation. "I realized the enormity of the task facing the committees, and what a great responsibility it was to have to arrive at a consensus within the committee." Sylvie Barma, who has been a member of the writing team for four years, is proud to have been part of the process. "When I first got involved, I realized that the decisions that were made would have an impact on future generations."

A New Optional Program: Spanish as a Third Language

According to the coordinator, the program will now become the reference document for all Spanish teachers and will give them a shared vision of the competencies that students should develop, as well as the communicative approach that should be used based on the contextualization of learning.

Beginning in September 2007, the new program, Spanish as a Third Language, will be offered as an option in Secondary Cycle Two in French and English public and private schools throughout Québec.

Suzanne Belzil, the coordinator of French as a second language, linguistic, academic and social integration and third language programs, emphasizes that the program results from the combined efforts of many people from a number of different groups: the writing committee (including Hélène Pelland, Spanish teacher at Collège de l'Assomption), the design committee (Spanish teachers from various regions of Québec), and the expert committee (Spanish didactics professors at the university level). The program was also submitted for public consultation and validation by a large number of stakeholders in the education community.

A program based on openness

In the Spanish as a Third Language program, language is viewed as a way to establish contact with Spanish speakers in various countries and to develop an attitude of openness, respect and tolerance toward them. As students come into contact with cultural realities that differ from their own, they become more aware of their own culture, while recognizing the contribution made by other cultures, and discover the existence of universal values. This helps them enrich their world-view and structure their identity. In addition, knowledge of Spanish gives them an extra communication tool, empowering them to act in a society increasingly open to the world.

The Spanish program is intended to allow non-Hispanophone Québec students to communicate in Spanish, become familiar with the related cultures, and cultivate an interest in Spanish that will continue beyond their secondary schooling. The program provides them with the basic tools they need to understand Spanish, and to speak and write Spanish in everyday situations. It also offers an opportunity to discover and understand some of the cultural characteristics of Spanish-speaking countries.

A program of interrelated competencies

The Spanish program targets the development of three inter-related competencies that develop in synergy: *Interacts in Spanish, Understands a variety of texts in Spanish* and *Produces a variety of texts in Spanish*. Anything the students hear, read or see may become the inspiration for a subsequent interaction or production that can, in turn, suggest subjects for further exploration by reading.

The development of the competencies in the Spanish program is supported by other elements of the Québec Education Program. For example, they are applied in learning and evaluation situations that address issues drawn from the broad areas of learning and that require one or more cross-curricular or subject-specific competencies.

A program that encourages students to communicate

Like the second-language programs in the QEP, the Spanish program is communication-based. The ability to speak, communicate and interact and to read and write in the target language are essential competencies, whether at school or in everyday life. Students will be able to talk to Spanish speakers at home or abroad, for example, when applying for a job, in Québec or elsewhere.

In the section of the program that deals with the pedagogical context, several aspects are emphasized to encourage students to speak. Teachers have an important role to play, by using language adapted to the level of their students and offering meaningful, stimulating activities and learning situations that match their interests and offer a reasonable challenge. The students, too, are responsible for developing their competencies, by participating actively in their learning and getting involved in the interaction, comprehension and production tasks set by the teacher.

Source: Suzanne Belzil

Tracey Arial

She got the idea from her colleague, Bonnie Smith, a grade three teacher. Smith operated reading centres with the help of one-time resource person Verna Maurice, who has since introduced the concept into a grade four classroom.

The three teachers enthusiastically shared their learning centre idea with participants in the "And what are you reading?" conference in Montréal last April 3 and 4. The conference offered educators implementing the *Action Plan on Reading in Schools* a unique opportunity to share insights and resources with one another and with members of the public. It also marked the final celebration in Montréal's stint as World Book Capital.

Luce, Smith and Maurice spent most of their seminar showing a two-part video of children doing a variety of reading-oriented activities at different locations in Smith's and Luce's classrooms. Some children played board games in the corner; others placed word cards into pockets on a wall; a few listened to stories being read to them in another corner; others wrote a play together at a table in the centre; some sat next to a book shelf reading alone; and others read to a teacher or resource person at bigger tables in other parts of the rooms. A few students could be seen walking throughout both rooms writing notes in a little book. Later, the video showed these "note-takers" describing positive actions—neatness, task concentration, cooperation, etc.—by students during reading centre learning period.

The 21 grade one students made a bit more noise than the 29 grade three students, but both classes functioned very quietly, particularly considering how much was going on at once.

Learning centres put education into students' hands

After the video, elementary-level teachers from other schools asked lots of questions. Do students always stay focused on tasks, as seemed to be the case in the video? "Oh yes," said Smith. Children choose from among three different activities at each centre, so they want to accomplish the task they've chosen. "Students become responsible for their own learning."

How long does such a system take to set up? Plan on taking several hours to set up the multi-activity centres before the children arrive in the classroom at the beginning of the year, said Maurice. Centres have themes such as ABC, science, nonfiction, writing, poetry, sound print, independent reading and research. Books are

grouped by level so that all readers have choices at each centre. It then takes about a month at the beginning of the year to train the students how to use the centres properly. After that, the centres run for half an hour every day without difficulty.

Why isn't it noisier? Each centre contains a cardboard volume control card so that the students can decide on their own noise level. They tend to choose lower levels.

Do students interrupt the teacher frequently? Teachers wear aprons during busy periods so that kids know not to approach them.

Other than pulling guided reading tables into the classroom, are there other benefits to centred learning? Yes, says Smith. Running two guided reading groups in the classroom every day means that every child gets heard by either the teacher or the resource person at least three times a week. "You still have to teach reading to the stronger readers," says Luce. "Guided reading means focusing teaching on what students need."

Thanks to the enthusiastic promotion of Luce, Smith and Maurice, learning centres are becoming popular throughout their school. A grade six teacher in the school liked how they worked so much, she recently set up learning centres for math as well.

Reading circles engage students

If learning centres aren't inspiring, consider using reading circles to engage students instead. France LePetitcorps presented the idea in a subsequent seminar.

To make sure that every student fully participates in the exercise, each circle should have no more than six students, and ideally only three or four, said LePetitcorps.

Students begin by choosing their own books, with only enough to make sure that each group reads something different. The choice of book determines the group students belong to, which cuts down on commotion in the classroom.

Groups then meet regularly—perhaps every week for a month or so—to discuss their readings. Although discussions should occur naturally, with students choosing the subjects, they should be provided with note-taking rubrics to encourage them to record discussions about the book and how they and their peers conduct themselves while working in groups.

With this type of note-taking, student evaluations emerge from the observations of students and peers, putting the teacher in a purely facilitating role. During the reading circles, teachers can observe students to determine potential options for future lessons.

Choose books kids want to read

Wondering which books to provide for the circles? Two librarians—Dayle Cushen, from Lindsay Place High School, and Suzanne Nesbitt, from Westwood Senior High School—have lots of good ideas for English-language readers in high school. Their "Everything but the Kitchen Sink" seminar included a 14-page list of books for every interest and reading level.

Surprisingly, the 1971 anonymous favourite *Go Ask Alice* remains widely popular among teens. Similar choices include *Crank*, by Ellen Hopkins, *Jinx*, by Margaret Wild, *Junk*, by Melvin Burgess and *A Million Little Pieces*, by James Frey. These books could provoke lots of interesting discussion in the classroom.

Secondary school students often feel out of place. Books that feature weird characters can help. Some selections include: *Downsiders*, by Neal Shusterman, *Freaks: Alive on the Inside*, by Annette Curtis Klaus, *Mister Monday*, by Garth Nix and *Twilight*, by Stephanie Mayer.

Although boys and girls have their own favourites, one of the librarians spoke about a male student who read every book in a popular girls' series. The librarian gave him the book in a plain paper bag, so that none of his friends would tease him. Favourites that usually appeal to boys include: *Juice*, by Eric Walters, *The Rose that Grew from Concrete*, by Tupak Amaru Shakur and *The Lost Years of Merlin*, by T. A. Barron. Favourites popular with girls include *Define Normal*, by Julie Anne Peters, *The Healing Time of Hickeys*, by Karen Rivers, and *The True Meaning of Cleavage*, by Mariah Fredericks.

The librarians also recommended several popular biographies, including *Bob Marley: A Rebel Life*, by Dennis Morris, *King: A Comic Biography of Martin Luther King Jr.*, by Ho Che Anderson, and *Thura's Diary: A Young Girl's Life in War-Torn Baghdad*, by Thura Al-Windawi.

Cushen and Nesbitt finished by emphasizing that teachers and librarians are on the same team in that they both enjoy inspiring children to read. The hardest situation, they say, occurs when a child claims to dislike reading. They recommend answering: "You just haven't found the right book yet."

Last August, a Summer Literary Camp was held as part of the *Action Plan on Reading in Schools*. The camp was designed for teachers, librarians, professionals and administrators in the education system who are charged with the challenge of encouraging young people, especially boys, to read more and to make reading part of their everyday activities. To get a flavour of what went on, listen to podcasts that feature interviews with both the animators and participants by visiting the following Web site:
http://rise.learnquebec.ca

FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more ideas on promoting reading and to find out about upcoming events, visit the *And what are you reading?* Web site:
http://www.mels.gouv.qc.ca/lecture/index_en.asp

Annual Art Exhibit Invites Community to Appreciate Student Talent

Tracey Arial and Hélène Katz

At first, the words "love life" below a deep red heart in a black background seemed to make a simple statement. Then, the other half of the picture representing "hate life" became apparent and the simple picture became a more complex identity statement. The deep black covered other images expressing the many levels of teenage emotion.

The poignant artwork appeared among watercolours, pastels, oil canvases and comic strips at the fourth annual Riverside School Board ArtsSmarts Vernissage. The event was held May 29 and 30 at the Brossard Socio-Cultural Centre. The evening of art exhibits, theatre, dance (ballroom and breakdancing) and PowerPoint presentations highlighted several projects that took place throughout the 2005-2006 school year.

The ArtsSmarts program was launched across Canada in 1998 by the Canadian Conference of the Arts and the J.W. McConnell Family Foundation. It provides seed money to local projects to improve student learning by partnering artists with teachers in classrooms. Some 1 400 schools across the country have participated so far. Projects have involved 223 000 students, 9 500 educators and 3 000 artists. In 2000, the Riverside School Board received funding for six years.

Some of the 600 Riverside students who participated last year demonstrated their new skills during the vernissage. Highlights included dancing pirates, marionettes and "Little Princes" in pyjamas. The audience enjoyed two plays, including a comedy in which theatre students from Dawson College performed a script written by Centennial High School students about a 35-year-old Dungeons and Dragons fanatic hanging around with 15-year-olds. A silent auction raised $1 800 for the South Shore Educational Foundation, which supports programs outside of the main school curriculum—including future ArtsSmarts projects.

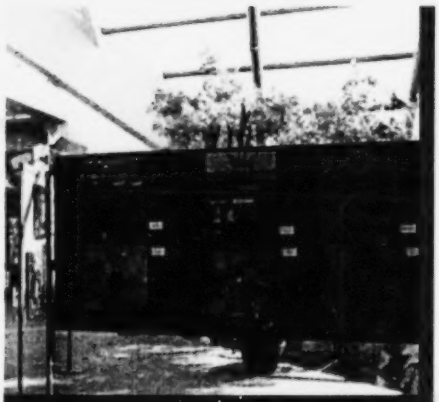
In keeping with the goals of the QEP, ArtsSmarts promotes cross-curricular competencies says Heather Hancheruk, until recently Riverside's ArtsSmarts and Culture Coordinator. "The teacher's role is to collaborate with the artist to deliver a curriculum," she explains. "The artist tries to weave it around the theme of what students are learning at the time." For example, theatre could be used as an interactive method to teach students English language arts and dance could be a means to learn about science. Projects often occur across cycles and encourage cross-curricular learning. "In fact, there's a perfect marriage between the two. It helps teachers have a vehicle to put it all together for them."

ArtsSmarts promotes more than arts education. "If you have music, dance, drama and visual arts taking place in one project in a school, you're building self-esteem," she explains. "Sometimes visual arts are the only thing (students) remember and feel a part of because they were involved with it."

Under the auspices of ArtsSmarts, for example, students at William Latter school in Chambly planted a garden, developed walking stones on which was printed an insect, and painted a mural inside the school. "The entrance was transformed into an environmental paradise," Hancheruk says. "It lifts your spirits to come into the school now." An environmental theme was incorporated into each grade level in the elementary school's science, geography, math and history curriculum. Students made compost that was used in the school's garden and they documented what worms did and did not eat. "There was a lot of learning going on," Hancheruk says.

A study by Grahame Meredith of ArtsSmarts participants in 2003 found that integrating art into the curriculum develops cognitive and social capacities, fosters creative thinking, increases test scores, improves self-esteem and engages students. He reported that 70 per cent of the educators found the projects increased student engagement in school. More than half of the student participants discovered arts as a new way of learning, while 71 per cent of them shared their experiences with classmates after the project ended. Many young people seen as "problem students" began demonstrating artistic skills and leadership.

The Riverside School Board is actively looking for funding to continue the program once the grant runs out. The McConnell Foundation is providing half of the program's funding at Riverside this year. Schools, through resources obtained from their communities, will provide the balance for current projects. The board's Arts Advisory Committee is considering fundraising campaigns, producing an art calendar for 2008, and support from local businesses and community groups.



Marie-Josée Lépine

Scientific and technical culture has two aspects. First, it is a set of competencies and knowledge in science and technology that we, as individuals or as a group, can appropriate and use. Second, it is an attitude that requires us to question science and technology, the methods it involves, their repercussions, and related issues. In today's world, as we face increasingly numerous and complex scientific and technical requirements and changes in our lives, it becomes even more important for each person to develop a scientific culture.

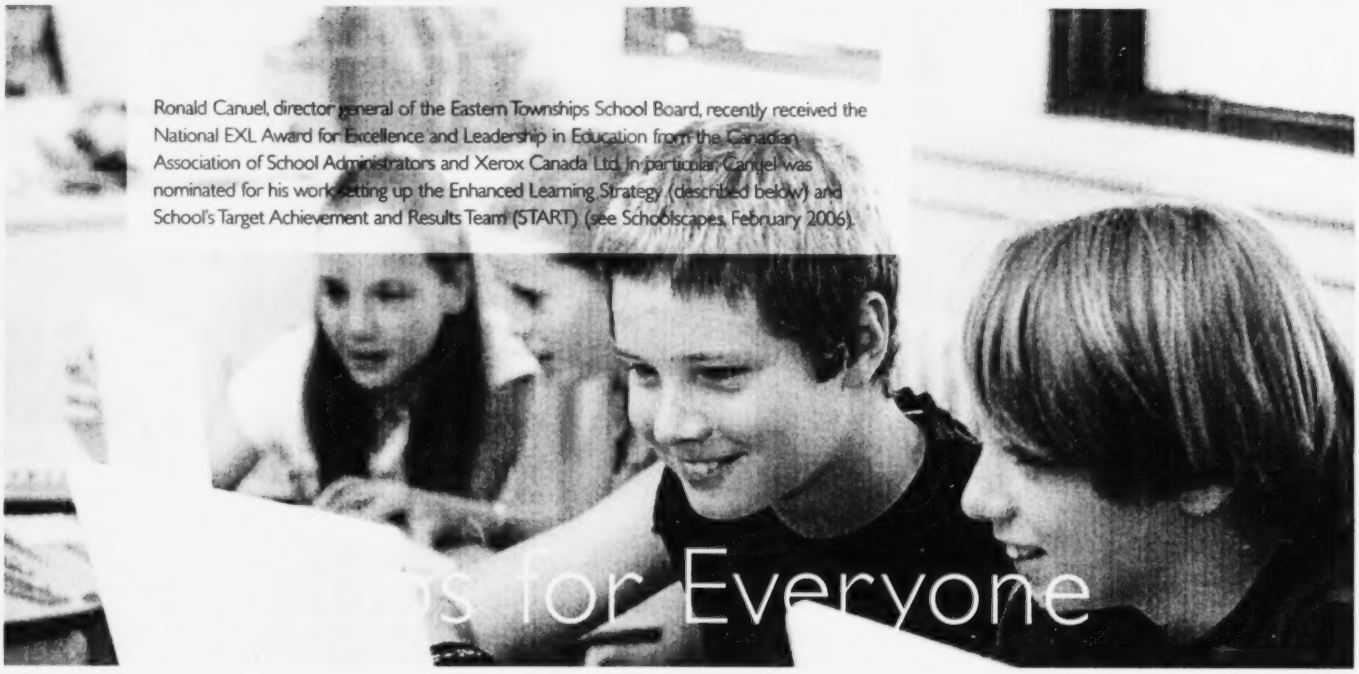
"The field of science and technology is well reflected in the Québec Education Program," says Lacroix. "It touches on all the other areas of learning, and especially Health and Well-Being, Environmental Awareness and Consumer Rights and Responsibilities, and Citizenship and Community Life. Science and technology occupy a key position in the development of most cross-curricular competencies, especially in solving problems, exercising critical judgment, using creativity and achieving potential. From elementary school on, the foundation for a scientific approach is built up through activities involving observation and manipulation, asking questions and using methods of logical reasoning, such as classification. Through these activities, students become able to suggest explanations and solutions based on a scientific process."

To promote science and technology, the Direction de la culture scientifique et de la relève supports organizations and projects for young people, teachers and the general public. For example, the PISTES project (www.pistes.org) has developed tools to support secondary school teachers in their work. A host of pedagogical tools are available on-line, giving access to various learning and evaluation situations. In addition, teachers, science didacticians and scientists pool their knowledge to answer questions from users.

Science and technology allow us to understand and explain complex phenomena. For example, the learning and evaluation situation *Un problème étouffant* (a stifling problem) offered by PISTES makes students aware of the social role played by each individual, since pollution is a problem that extends well beyond the borders of each country.

"Activities at school that develop and enrich the students' scientific culture help meet the objectives of the Québec Education Program," according to Lacroix. The acquisition of a wide range of knowledge, a questioning attitude and a better understanding of scientific phenomena help students construct a more accurate world-view and play an informed role in the collective decision-making process, as well as encouraging them to take action.

"Our work and tools," Lacroix concludes, "together with those of the Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport in the area of scientific and technical culture, help mould complete, responsible citizens with open, but critical minds."



Ronald Canuel, director general of the Eastern Townships School Board, recently received the National EXL Award for Excellence and Leadership in Education from the Canadian Association of School Administrators and Xerox Canada Ltd. In particular, Canuel was nominated for his work setting up the Enhanced Learning Strategy (described below) and School's Target Achievement and Results Team (START) (see Schoolscapes, February 2006).

s for Everyone

Tracey Arial

Most students appreciate the change. "It's made school much more up-to-date," says Paul George, from Richmond Regional High School. "We can brag about having the laptops. One of my friends complained to his principal to get computers too."

Such strong student buy-in was the key reason for introducing this technology into the classroom, says Ronald Canuel, director general of the Eastern Townships School Board and the key promoter of the project. The idea originated with the late Dennis McCullough, who during his time as director of educational services at ETSB was approached by a representative of Apple Canada regarding the possibility of doing a pilot project in one of the board's schools. When McCullough brought the idea to Canuel, it got expanded to something more systematic.

Though several of Canuel's schools reported impressive computer use, others lagged behind. Technology was getting in the way of learning. "Going to the computer lab is the equivalent of a field trip and not all teachers are willing to make that commitment. When you give tools to the students, things change."

Canuel's observation has been borne out. Under the laptop project—officially known as the "Enhanced Learning Strategy"—he estimates that about 10 per cent of his teachers still don't use computers at all in their classrooms but, as he points out, "now it's the students who are asking them why."

Direct-learning worth the expense

Not everything has gone smoothly. The first sign of community dissent came when a parent stood up and spoke against the $12.5 million deficit-financed project at the press conference launch in January 2003.

Canuel understood that parent's concern. The school has financed the entire cost of the project (which includes training, software, and technology) through long-term bank loans with a payback over six to eight years. The laptops themselves are leased, although after deferred payments over four years, the school will own them outright. The laptops should last five to six years and then the school board will invest in the next technological innovation that makes sense, be it cell phones, palms, or some other tool. In the meantime, the cost of the laptops has dropped by 25 per cent over the life of the project, saving the school board more than they originally anticipated.

Canuel believes that his investment in direct-learning tools—the laptops—will help solve some of the challenges he's facing in terms of infrastructure costs and a teacher shortage. More importantly, he believes that they will prevent students from dropping out. "I told that parent, 'it was either your daughter or the wall and I chose your daughter.'"

Elementary students first

There were a number of frustrations in getting the project off the ground. For one thing, students wanted the tools faster than they were available. Paul George only had a single year with the laptops before graduating, while his 12-year-old sister and 13-year-old brother both got them before he did. "I was in a hole and it wasn't fair."

The "hole" that George refers to was created by the gradual introduction of laptops. In the first year, 2 200 elementary students in grade 3 and up got laptops, but at the secondary level, only Secondary V students got them, because the administration wanted to make sure that every student had at least one year with a laptop before leaving the system. George was in Secondary III. In October 2004, 4 600 computers were distributed to elementary students and those in Secondary I, II and V; George was in Secondary IV. He and his classmates were among the 5 600 students who got laptops in October 2005. He turned it in last June.

Another frustration came when Apple USA announced a world-wide recall of laptop motherboards. The problem affected the ETSB's initial order. More than 1 400 of the 2 200 laptops failed and had to be replaced. Canuel had to make sure that he had lots of loaners available to ensure that students didn't go more than a week without a laptop. George lost his laptop for a week as well, although in his case, the hard drive crashed because he stored too much music on it. The school board maintains strict rules to avoid such problems—and they use special software to ensure that the rules are followed—but many secondary school students quickly learn to bypass the technology.

George claims that for him, class time activities didn't change significantly. Students still read books, wrote essays, discussed issues and made presentations. They wrote essays much faster, however, and the final versions were cleaner and carefully spell checked. The computers also made it possible for teachers to explain complex issues with complete graphics and movement. His math teacher used a software program to show students the movement in ellipses as x, y and z values changed, for instance. Presentations also became a lot more fun, he says. Most secondary school students learn how to handle photos and text in PowerPoint very quickly, while others master animations and other impressive techniques.

Level playing field for special needs students

For other students, however, the computers have made a life-changing difference in their schooling. "Everything for my son has been challenging," says Barbara Hartwell, whose child has ADD and learning difficulties.

Hartwell noticed a big improvement when her son got his laptop in grade 6, especially because he showed great proficiency in using it. "He was up at Galt helping the teachers with things they needed to do on the computer." The quality of his essay writing also went up says Hartwell, so that he was performing at grade level. The computer "gave him more confidence."

Thanks to that laptop, Hartwell now trusts her son's abilities and believes he has a strong future in the workplace. "Last year was the first year that I could see that he really does have his own strengths," said Hartwell. "Just the confidence in him—he'll land on his feet. Will he get a diploma like the rest of his friends?—maybe not, but when it comes to computers, there's potential there. To have the ability to be computer-literate before you leave high school, that's something. There isn't a job that you don't need to be computer-literate to do."

Similar Projects Elsewhere

The Educational Programs and Services Branch of the New Brunswick Department of Education started a pilot laptop project in six schools (three French, three English) in 2004.

British Columbia's Ministry of Education embarked on a one-to-one laptop project last year, primarily because of the results of the Wireless Writing Program (WWP) in Peace River North, Fort St. John. The most impressive result of the WWP, according to a 2004-2005 study conducted by Sharon Jeroski, was the elimination of the gender gap in writing performance, with boys and girls reaching the same levels of achievement: Jeroski found that 88 per cent of girls met grade-level expectations, while 89 per cent of boys did so.

Kenneth R. Stevenson published two reports about the results of a laptop program in Beaufort County School district in South Carolina: one after year two in 1998 and the other after year three in 1999. Results include enhanced computer skills and improved spelling and writing skills. Third-year participants were less positive about the program than were early users. Teachers also reported problems such as poor student keyboard skills, laptop breakdown, inadequate professional development and a lack of instructional software. The school's latest technology integration project involves palm pilots for students.

The Mitchell Institute published a report on February 17, 2004, detailing how 285 students and 26 teachers at Maine-based Piscataquis Community High School fared in the first two years after receiving laptops.

Brief results:

- Daily attendance rate increased from 91 per cent to 98 per cent.
- Office referrals for discipline problems decreased by 45 per cent.
- Students reported more individual topic exploration, more writing and more presentations in class.
- Laptops improved interaction among students and between students and faculty.
- Textbooks are used less often.
- Disadvantages include laptop breakdown, network downtime, distraction in the classroom and student misuse of the computers.

New youth section comes on-line on the Conseil du statut de la femme Web site

For the new school year, the Conseil du statut de la femme (CSF) launched several actions to raise awareness in schools about sexual equality issues. The magazine *Gazette des filles* is dedicated entirely to young people, whether boys or girls, in Secondary Cycle Two, and an accompanying guide is available for teachers. An on-line forum on equal relationships is also offered to Québec teenagers. All this is found in the new youth section of the Web site, at <**www.egalitejeunesse.com**>.

The site includes games, suggestions for books and Web sites, and a special section for teachers. Secondary Cycle Two students can also express their views on sexual equality by completing the on-line questionnaire.

A CLEAR MESSAGE

At the various meetings held in the fall, Pierre Bergevin, Assistant Deputy Minister for preschool, elementary and secondary education, took the opportunity to reiterate the ministerial resolve to continue moving forward in implementing the education reform. This unequivocal message was delivered to the various players in the education community during the regional tour to meet school administrators and at the province-wide meeting for managers, the October 16 meeting of the Secondary Cycle Two program development committees, the conference on complementary educational services and the training session for resource people.

***Schoolscapes* will complete its coverage of the fall's major gatherings in its April issue, with a full report on the evaluation of learning in Secondary Cycle Two.**

The *Schoolscapes* team wishes you a Happy New Year.
May your dreams take shape in concrete projects in 2007!

Éducation, Loisir et Sport
Québec

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